

Using teacher effectiveness data in productive ways

Over the last several years, states and districts across the country have spent major time and effort developing and implementing new systems that use multiple measures to evaluate teachers' effectiveness. The aim of this work, which was largely driven by federal policies, was to have more rigorous and comprehensive evaluations that reflect the complexities of teaching, raise expectations for teaching, and, ultimately, help improve instruction and student learning.

While these evaluation systems were created at the state and district level, it's at the school and classroom levels that they are being put into action. With many of the systems up and running for a while now, schools have been collecting multiple types of teacher performance data — from classroom observation ratings to student test scores to instructional artifacts. Now that substantial amounts of information on teacher effectiveness are available, the question has become: What should school administrators do with all of these data?

As one school administrator remarked to REL West researcher Reino Makkonen: "We have a lot of data on teacher effectiveness, but not a way to pull it all together."

"The needs of states have shifted," says Makkonen, who directs REL West's Educator Effectiveness Alliance. Five or six years ago, states were grappling with developing their new teacher evaluation systems and determining

precisely which measures to integrate. REL West researchers supported states in the western region by conducting several studies to examine the quality and accuracy of various teacher-performance measures and, based on those findings, helping states to refine their systems accordingly. "But at this stage," says Makkonen, "school and district administrators are looking for guidance on how to aggregate, analyze, and use the multiple forms of teacher effectiveness data in productive ways."

Accordingly, REL West's recent work has moved toward a more explicit focus on the practical uses of teacher evaluation data at the district and school-site levels.

Insights from recent research

To gain a first-hand understanding of how districts are actually using their new teacher effectiveness data, REL West examined the efforts of

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—Participant in a REL West teacher effectiveness data-use workshop



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five districts in Arizona, each of which had implemented their own teacher evaluation systems aligned to state regulations passed in 2011. A recently released report (<https://relwest.wested.org/resources/215>) shares findings from this study, summarizing common experiences, practices, and perceptions related to using teacher evaluation data across the districts.

“One of the main takeaways from the Arizona study is that schools and districts really need to first focus on building an infrastructure for data review and feedback,” says Makkonen. “To be useful to educators and administrators, the right data must be available at the right time and in the right format.”

To avoid different types of data being scattered across different databases or delivered in hard-to-interpret formats, some districts are building data dashboards — essentially, teacher “report cards” that display results from classroom observations throughout the year, student assessments, and student and parent perception surveys. “Administrators really appreciate this kind of system as a way to organize disparate streams of data,” says Makkonen. “Having the data online and all in one place can also facilitate rich feedback conversations between coaches, principals, and teachers.”

Another key finding from the Arizona study: Evaluation data influence the professional development opportunities subsequently offered to teachers. Officials from all five districts in the study reported that they used their standards-based instructional frameworks and observation rubrics to identify teachers’ strengths and weaknesses across multiple domains and, thus, plan professional learning. For instance, the report indicates that, after reviewing teachers’ collective ratings in multiple areas, one of the district superintendents identified classroom

management as a particular challenge for many teachers — and, as a result, provided districtwide trainings to improve teacher performance in this area. The study also found that classroom observation data were seen as more useful than student test scores for informing professional development decisions, because observation results are collected over multiple occasions and are accessible throughout the school year (while statewide student test scores are released over the summer).

Helping principals learn to use teacher effectiveness data

Using teacher performance data for targeted decision-making — such as what type of professional development to offer teachers — has been the focus of a series of workshops conducted over the last several months by REL West in collaboration with the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders. In these workshops, participating administrators learned the strengths, limitations, and uses of different data sources, and practiced making informed decisions using both mock data and data from their own school or district. The workshops have been specifically targeted toward principals, says Makkonen, because they have a key role in supporting teachers that continues to evolve and deepen in significant ways.

“There are more demands on school administrators now,” says Makkonen. “It’s no longer enough to just manage the logistics of the site — administrators are increasingly being positioned as coaches and instructional leaders. While they may not be experts in pedagogy or specific content areas, they need to be able to create the conditions at their site for teachers to receive constructive, data-informed feedback about their instruction.”

In addition to helping principals learn to use data to facilitate these kinds of professional conversations about teachers’ instruction, the workshops give principals hands-on experience in cataloging the data they have available, figuring out which data are most useful for their needs, and analyzing these data to make any number of strategic decisions, including assigning teachers to appropriate grades and classes, and identifying teacher leaders and mentors.

All of these issues are of more importance than ever, says Makkonen, because many regions are facing teacher shortages — which means that, in line with current federal priorities, districts’ and schools’ focus is shifting from using evaluation measures primarily for teacher accountability toward using the measures to inform decisions that will help support, retain, and improve the current teachers. To achieve these goals, says Makkonen, administrators need to ask, “Are we using the information

we've gathered through our new systems to inform conversations and actions that create a more supportive environment for teachers, so they don't feel lost and frustrated in their work?"

Moving forward, REL West will continue to support states, districts, and schools in making the best use of the teacher evaluation systems they have created. Currently, REL West staff are finalizing a video workshop — based on the recent in-person trainings — that principals and administrators anywhere can download for free and use with colleagues to help them take stock of the teacher-performance data they are collecting.

"Data can intimidate people," noted a principal who participated in one of the Arizona trainings. "But the workshop activities empowered us to analyze our available data and make strategic decisions using that information."

For further information about the work of the Educator Effectiveness Alliance, contact Reino Makkonen at rmakkon@wested.org or 415.615.3356. Visit the Educator Effectiveness Alliance webpage to download related research and tools, including How Are Teacher Evaluation Data Used in Five Arizona Districts? (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2016142.pdf)

Selection of REL publications on educator effectiveness

REL West

Examining the validity of ratings from a classroom observation instrument for use in a district's teacher evaluation system

Do principals' observation-based ratings of teacher practice provide sound scores for teacher evaluation? This study examined the validity of principals' evaluation ratings of over 700 Nevada teachers, using an instrument adapted from the Danielson Framework for Teaching. (May 2016)
<https://relwest.wested.org/resources/217>

A descriptive study of the pilot implementation of student learning objectives in Arizona and Utah

Approximately 30 states are now adopting teacher evaluation policies that include student learning objectives (SLOs), which are classroom-specific student growth targets set by teachers and their principals. This study examines the results of pilot implementation of SLOs in two states that implemented them with the aim of improving student achievement and fulfilling the state's required student-accountability component for teacher evaluations. (November 2015)
<https://relwest.wested.org/resources/205>

Analysis of the stability of teacher-level growth scores from the student growth percentile model (Fact sheet)

How does a popular measure of teacher effectiveness hold up under scrutiny? This fact sheet distills the key findings from a study of an approach to teacher evaluation that assesses teachers based partly on student learning — using the student growth percentile model, which computes a score that is assumed to reflect a teacher's current and future effectiveness. The study analyzed three years of data on almost 370 teachers in a Nevada school district. (2016)
<https://relwest.wested.org/resources/210>

REL Central

A guide for monitoring district implementation of educator evaluation systems

This guide includes processes and tools (developed in collaboration with the Missouri Department of Education) that states and districts can use to monitor implementation of their educator evaluation systems. (April 2015)
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/central/pdf/REL_2015069.pdf

REL Northeast & Islands

Teacher evaluation and professional learning: Lessons from early implementation in a large urban district

This study examined an educator evaluation system in a large urban district, focusing on the written feedback provided to teachers who were rated less than proficient in one or more standards of effective teaching practice. The study examined the feedback and recommendations for professional learning that teachers received, the professional activities the teachers ultimately participated in, and whether teachers' ratings improved in a subsequent evaluation. (March 2016)
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2016115.pdf

Relationship between school professional climate and teachers' satisfaction with the evaluation process

This study aimed to explore factors that contribute to teachers' satisfaction with new educator evaluation processes. Specifically, the study looked at associations between teachers' perceptions of their school's professional climate and their satisfaction with the school's formal teacher evaluation process. (May 2016)
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2016133.pdf

REL West resources provide guidance on using multiple measures for teacher evaluation and improvement

Animated video: Making meaningful use of teacher effectiveness data

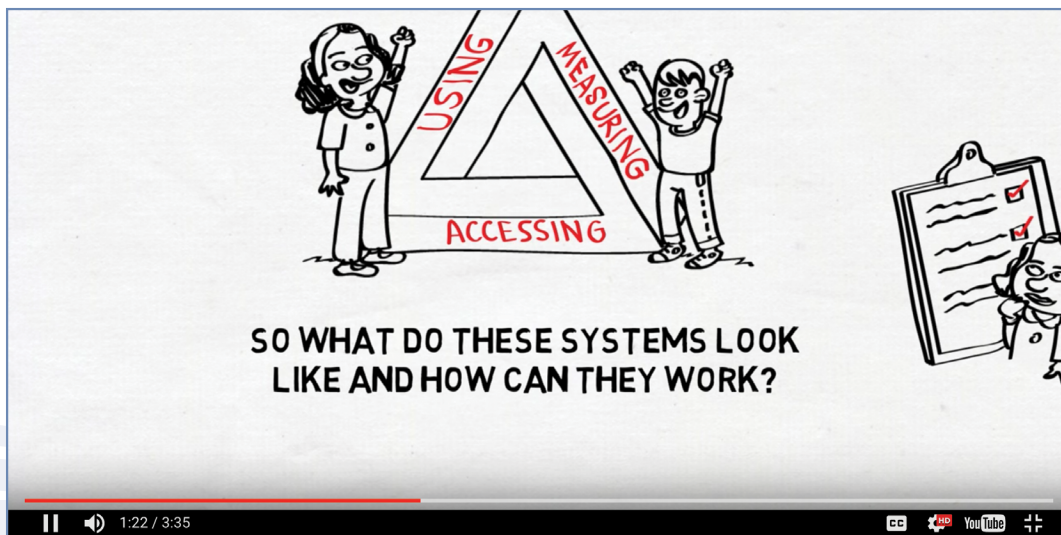
Drawing on a range of recent research, this three-and-a-half-minute video explores using multiple measures to evaluate teachers and improve classroom practice. Told through the experiences of a fictional teacher and her principal, the video focuses on a sequence of interrelated activities grouped into three key areas: measuring teacher effectiveness, accessing and reviewing data, and using data for improvement. (September 2015)

<https://relwest.wested.org/resources/198>

Logic model: Making meaningful use of teacher effectiveness data

This two-page logic model offers an accessible synthesis of the benefits and challenges of different teacher evaluation measures: observations, measures derived from student test results, and student and parent survey ratings. It also provides a reference list with useful tools, research, and resources. (April 2015)

<https://relwest.wested.org/resources/193>



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